

E X I S T E N C E

March 5–29, 1987

Opening Reception
March 5, 7–9 PM

Gallery Hours
Wed.–Sun. 12–6 PM

**Gordon
Gilbert**

**Taeg
Nishimoto**

**Kyong
Park**

PRESS RELEASE

When an Architecture comes into being, it is reasonable to begin to describe its EXISTENCE within that particular being. As being is so often ineffably descriptive, and more than philosophically elusive, a primal and unavoidable constancy of search for the things that can reify this EXISTENCE thus takes place. Its course: towards the landscape of the undetermined, guided only by personal experience and a fundamental spirit for dwelling in the ground. To find HOME at the edge of this landscape, a place where body, mind and spirit are unified.

EXISTENCE, for these three architects, is the actuator of their communal spirit. Its phenomenal essence is able to be objectified as a THING and thus becomes transcendent. That THING is the TREE. It is, for them, a structure of nature, so constructed by external forces and so deeply rooted in the Earth that its own being may provide the ground for their own excursively personal mentalities of making and thinking: the conjugation of which is presented at STOREFRONT in the form of drawings/texts. It is clear in their works that what we do see in a TREE (its trunk and branches) and what we do not see (its roots) are not spliced together merely by a two dimensional ground plane. The depth of the Earth and the sky are equal in density and in their revealment of the essence of the being of the TREE.

These works are not for immediate understanding. They are about the necessitation of a sustained effort by the observer. Their power grows as we enter them further and further, to exchange our depth of participation with their depths of their experiences. This collaboration of observer, dweller, and maker, as seen in this exhibition, is reflective of Architecture as an act of EXISTENCE. These architects pursue, unrelentingly so, the capturing of the mysteries of life in order to set them free again in a new state of being.

Neil M. Denari

New York, February, 1987

STOREFRONT
for Art & Architecture

97 Kenmare Street at Lafayette, New York, NY 10012 212 431-5795

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

March 5-29, 1987

EXISTENCE

Gordon Gilbert
Taeg Nishimoto
Kyong Park

This is an exhibition of drawings and models by three New York architects who differ in their approaches to making architecture but share a conviction that architecture can be an art uniquely expressive of existence. This conviction places their works outside the normal limits of architectural practice, which often precludes the degree of experimentation and exploration required by a search whose goal, by its very nature, cannot be wholly known in advance. These works seen here make no claims of finality yet are of interest because they document with originality and skill the unique research of each exhibitor.

Gordon Gilbert is a registered architect who also holds graduate degrees in art history and painting. He has been in individual practice for the past ten years in New York City and Miami. His previous exhibitions have involved installations, artifacts and staged activities of a personal nature.

Taeg Nishimoto is an architect practicing in New York City and Tokyo. He holds a faculty position at New Jersey Institute of Technology and has previously taught at Columbia University. His effort to re-examine the meaning of architectural elements, both in an architectonic and poetic sense, has been developed through drawings interpreting "Poetics of Space" and a built house at Tumagoi. This exhibition of a house in progress is a further development in that exploration.

Kyong Park, as a founder-director of STOREFRONT, has gathered independent artists and architects to the environment of collaboration and collectivism in arts. As an architect, his projects invoke a mandalic vision of urban housing, where the needs and aspirations of man are hung on the balance of his complex and intricate symmetry.

This is the first full-scale architectural exhibit for the re-instituted STOREFRONT Gallery and sets the experimental and collaborative tone for future STOREFRONT exhibitions, while suggesting a standard against which they will be measured. The STOREFRONT for Art and Architecture, founded in 1982, is an open and independent organization, unique in New York at the present time, and with this exhibition continues its examination of new thinking and work in architecture. An extensive article on STOREFRONT appears in the February 1987 issue of the international architectural review A+U (Architecture and Urbanism).

STOREFRONT

Art and Architecture

97 Kenmare Street New York, NY 10012 212-431-5795

NOTE

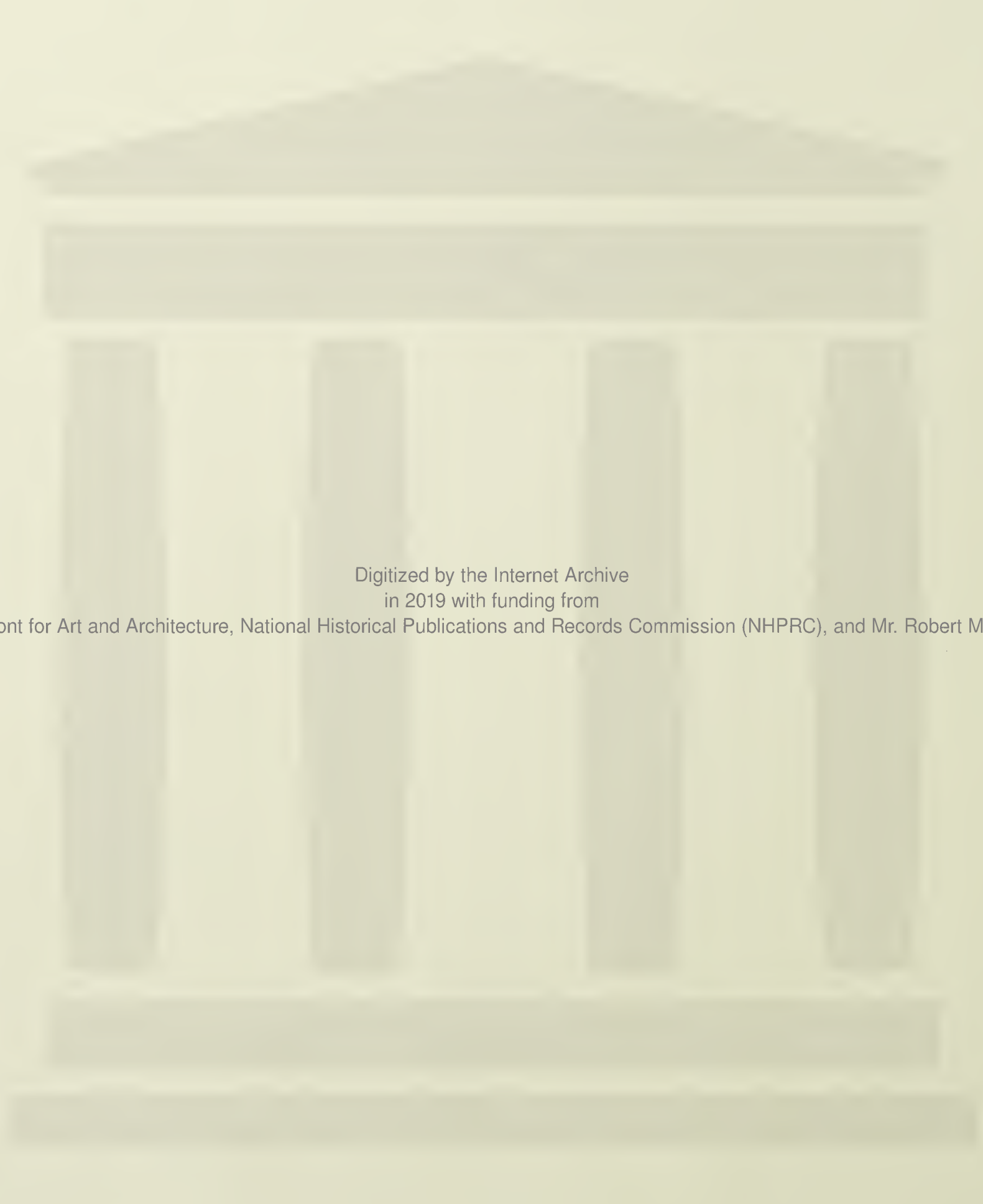
Architecture should be understood not as an object, but as a series of elements (floor, ceiling, wall window, etc.) which form space and place. Architecture finds its *raison d'être* only through the capacity to evoke our life in its physiological, emotional, physical, and spiritual sense, the capacity to stimulate our imagination, which develops into a definite relationship between architecture and the individual. This relationship is expected to share possibilities of what happens (or does not happen) between architecture and the individual, and should not be limited to the range of what is expressed with architectural elements.

Every architectural element has its own consciousness, which could be defined as its iconography. We experience this consciousness through an actual architectural setting, which cannot avoid the issue of style, the issue of formal subjectivity. Beyond this issue of style, we have a certain collective association with each architectural element. A wall, a column, a window, etc. could take any form according to its expected style. But when an element is applied to an imagination, in our association there is a definite purification of its image as an archetype that has infinite possibilities of expansion. This purified image is essentially variational, and not, as in the case of a concept, an ordering device. Our collective association addresses this image in the sense that we can interpret the image in an active way.

The way we relate ourselves with these architectural elements is based on the relationships which elements create among themselves. Each element has its own independent significance in the whole setting, and creates its own independent association with our imagination. All the elements require their part in the relationship between our experience of architecture and our memories about it. The independent existence of each element juxtaposing with each other simultaneously, as we live in that relationship. Elements articulate spaces, create various places in the setting, which make as little hierarchical relationships as possible, because there is no hierarchy within the associations we apply to these architectural elements. The whole setting is as simultaneous as our life, or the collective life of society.

Taeg Nishimoto





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TRUNK AND WOOD 'STRUCTURE

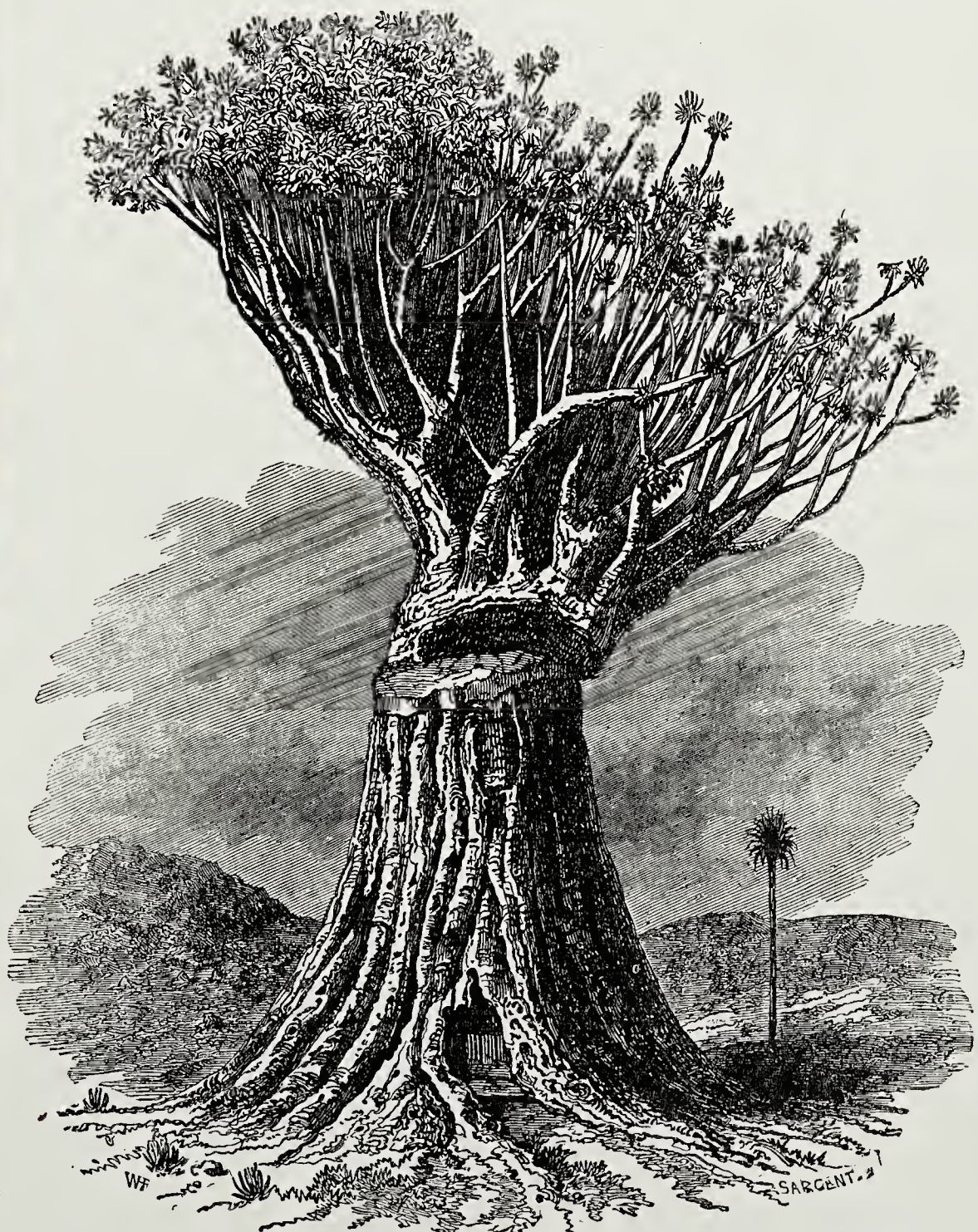
the English Oak (*Quercus robur*), but a small group of species is well known to live for very much longer, for example the English Yew (*Taxus baccata*) is known to have reached 1 000 years. However, most notable are the Coast and Mountain Redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens* and *Sequoia-dendron giganteum*) of the Western United States and a few other conifers; also there are well authenticated long-lived individuals of the monocotyledonous Dragon Tree (*Dracaena draco*). In all of them a life span exceeding 2 000 years is attained, with isolated examples of Dragon Tree and Bristle-cone Pine (*Pinus aristata*) achieving life spans in excess of 4 000 years. In practice many trees have their natural life span cut short by demands of forest management which call for regular felling and wood utilization and of urban amenity forestry where declining trees have to be felled because of the danger to the public.

Ask a child to draw a tree and he will start with the trunk, then add a fan or brush of branches. In short, the trunk is integral to the popular concept of a tree, yet the prominence and size of that trunk can vary enormously.

The Canary Island Dragon Tree (*Dracaena draco*) is renowned for its longevity, specimens sometimes exceeding 2 000 years. This famous specimen, pictured in an old engraving, was destroyed by a hurricane in 1868.



Pine (*P. sylvestris*) it is of profound effect on over- trees either in close d individuals. Finally, altitudinal limits of a roached, increasingly and often malformed scarcely recognizable same species as the arther south or lower n. It is easy to forget gnarled and stunted of great antiquity – of years old. e to say that few trees a healthy state beyond d years – and this in- g-lived species such as





The swollen trunk of the Baobab (*Adansonia digitata*) makes it an unmistakable tree of the African savannas. Its gigantic girth is rivalled only by that of the giant American redwoods, although its height is much less.

In the tropics, trees with massive trunks and relatively little in the way of crown (because of restricted branching) are conveniently called 'pachycaulous' (= thick-stemmed) whilst trees with relatively slender stems and a generous bushy crown from extensive branching, are known as 'leptocaulous' (= slender-stemmed). In many low-growing trees, and even in some large, mature individuals of certain coniferous trees such as the English Yew and the Old World cedars (*Cedrus* spp), a single, well-defined trunk may not always be readily recognizable, yet in normal full-grown specimens of most of our common deciduous trees, such as oaks, ashes and beeches, it is almost impossible to conceive of the tree without its trunk; and in the vast majority of conifers this is even more emphatically the case. The existence and continuing prominence of the trunk springs from the fact that in early life there exists a radially organized central axis extending from the young shoot tip down into the root. At first, as in a beech seedling in the first year of life, the line of demarcation between stem and root in this slender axis may not always be readily apparent. Yet their destinies are very different and it is the slender, already woody, stem of the sapling which is gradually transformed, over a period of years, into the trunk of the full-grown tree. Growing trees in close-set stands can inhibit survival of lateral branches so that it is common to see such stands of pine or spruce composed of trees,

perhaps thirty or forty years old, in which the trunks appear to rise unbranched to an impressive height. To some extent the absence of lateral branches will have been encouraged by early 'brashing' operations by foresters. Certainly, isolated individuals of the same species will present a very different picture. Many species of palm, including the Oil Palm of West Africa (*Elaeis guineensis*), Date Palm (*Phoenix dactylifera*) and Coconut Palm (*Cocos nucifera*) are structurally quite distinct in that the trunk is in a very strict sense an unbranched stem, surmounted only by a crown of enormous leaves. Palms, moreover, it may be remarked, grow in an entirely different manner from either hardwood or conifer (softwood) trees, and their 'wood,' though chemically similar and extremely tough, is in its arrangement and disposition in the stem quite unlike wood as we ordinarily know it from hardwoods and softwoods.

In many tropical trees the trunks are sinuous to a degree not readily matched in the trees of north temperate forests. In a mature Baobab (*Adansonia digitata*) the trunk is characteristically of immense width.

The anatomical arrangement of the cellular components of the trunk of a tree is basically similar in conifers and broadleaves, only the components themselves vary. In simple terms a number of layers can be recognized – from the outside, the outer protective bark, the sugar conducting phloem (or inner bark) and the inner solid core of wood (xylem) through the younger elements of which water is conducted. Between the phloem and wood there is a narrow band of actively dividing cells (vascular cambium) which produce secondary phloem to the outside and

secondary xylem on

To look at these start with the wood bulk of the trunk element of commerce called 'hardwoods' (broadleaved) wood consists, in varying principal components are the vessels, which tubular cells placed end to end and open passage-way member and the next these are the water-of the plant. Secondary of most hardwoods of the fibrous component a great number of (fibers) with thick walls more or less closely bound by a strong matrix in which are interspersed. The hard wood will depend on the number and thickness of their cells. Hardwoods contain a cell wall living, fairly thin-walled wood parenchyma), tissue with storage starch. The sequences among the components. This living is physiologically linked 'rays,' which are in effect of a few vertically stacked (parenchymatous) cells replete with storage substance in trunk or branch (that in a transverse section) these are the radiating lines, the boundaries are often easily visible to the naked eye. Last of the five cellular elements are the tracheids. They are plentiful in hardwoods and they make up almost the whole of the cylinder' (apart from the softwoods (coniferous) which have a small number of exceptionally large cotyledons. Tracheids are elements performing the function of time the conducting member and the strengthening fiber. Parts of their lumen are very freely supplied with water pits, and it is these that transfer from cell to cell.

When young and growing, vessels, tracheids and other elements are pregated with a substance. When they die this substance is lost so that the rigid cell shape is maintained. This is a generalized term for the complex carbon compounds

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Storefront's GNP

"Existence" was the title of the three-man show held at the Storefront for Art and Architecture (March 5-29)--but don't be misled. It was not an allegorical morality play on the word, but an identification of the lowest common denominator between three very different architects and their works. Shows of this kind usually fail because the diversity defeats any sense of overall coherence, but this show succeeded because on an existential level the diversity of means and ends refers to a common theme within the word, a kind of inwardly-directed "existence will" common to all things, including architects and their architecture. Hence, the trees.

Like curious visitors from the forest, small, dead trees inhabited the gallery together with the works displayed. This recalled the show's poster in which a 19th Century engraving of a dragon tree replaced *pro forma* architectural imagery. The tree, symbolic and literal, is another common denominator. Roots, trunk, branches, blossoms. Not bad metaphors for three architects who share what the existentialists used to call *engagement* and a healthy ambition to see it reach fruition. The question here was, did it?

Gordon Gilbert's images are photographs, photostats, photocopies of his own drawings--another idea that shouldn't work, in this case because of the usually deadening effect of reproduction media on original work, but it does. This is because Gilbert doesn't merely reproduce his drawings, but uses these media to take them farther and to stranger places than he otherwise could. The original drawings are transformed, in ways that were not--could not--be entirely predicted or controlled. That's what happens when our work goes into machines. Uncertainty takes over. Things go wrong--or can that be right? Gilbert's techniques of producing, reproducing and re-reproducing seem to show us that it is. The visual power of the images is related to an ethic

governing the architect's work and life. His will has been released into the larger will of nature, into the blind forces of nature that--as the physicists tell us--can only be quantitatively described by a wavering probability curve. The result, in Gilbert's case, is like that of a drawing left in the forest for a year to weather a bit, only better. Inside the infernal reproduction machines, probability meets a literal *deus ex machina*, yielding not the entropy of transformative decay, but an additive, constructive growth. More comes out than went in, because the architect had the courage to let the products of his will become part of and at the same time playfully challenge a larger will--that of "Existence."

The results are visually stunning, to the point of being unsettling. These are mature images, of a quality rarely seen. The large color pieces have about them a demonic-magical quality, very religious in their intensity, yet unsubmitive, even heroic in their assertions. They are structures, symmetrical and ever enfolding, from another world or time, or perhaps only from more deeply within our own. The large black-and-white pieces have the same obsessive symmetries that I can't help but relate to what physicists are hypothesizing today about the underlying structure of matter and energy in the cosmos. In an age of both media machines and a new speculative cosmology, Gilbert has built a bridge between disparities, with works of arcane probability and sensual mystery. In his process Gilbert has found a unique strain of truth. The impact of his productions is unforgettable.

Taeg Nishimoto was represented at Storefront by three projects: a house built in Japan, a new house, yet to be built, and a suite of illustrations for Bachelard's "Poetics of Space." Each of these reveals a sensitivity that is earnest in application, but as yet to limited effect. Nishimoto's spare, almost ordinary rooms and interiors speak of a quiet that is very nearly ascetic. In one room, a twig is the only object, laid carefully just within the frame of view. There is no furniture, no litter, no other evidence of human presence but the architectonic enclosure. This sort of "Poetics" requires drawing of great delicacy. The rendering in this case falls short of a depiction of light and subtle surface changes commensurate with what is almost certainly in Nishimoto's imagination. More successful are the simpler perspective line drawings. One of these reveals a sequence of boldly curved interior spaces linked by a staircase within the house. Nishimoto clearly has promise as an architect.

Kyong Park is the founder of Storefront. It will be a surprise to some people that he is an architect of substantial promise--surprising because talented people usually don't found galleries for showing the works of others. His very evident talents show his efforts at Storefront over the past ⁵four years to be all the more remarkable for their commitment to an ideal of community in the arts at the expense of time that could be committed to his own work. I suspect, though, that he gains from his intercourse with others something important that feeds, indirectly, into his work--something having to do, again, with a letting go of private will into a larger will, that of a community, a wider nature. In any event, he has with the work shown here managed a breakthrough.

When Park first showed his House of Bowery and his Adam's House projects in 1984, I was charmed by them. On one hand, these rambling, improbable wood structures, destined for a city that was nowhere evident in the drawings, recall the archaic vernacular architecture of some lost, forest culture. On the other hand, they are highly sculpted forms, conscious in their playfulness and deliberate in their spontaneity, very ^{old and yet}sophisticated, very modern. Another East-meets-West duality, waiting for development beyond the loose ink sketches of that time. This they have found in the recent Urban Ark scheme. The vernacular, folk qualities are still there, owing perhaps to the suggestions of wood joinery and certain curvilinear forms recalling Eastern folk architecture, but here they appear in powerfully symmetrical alignments, in terms of both form and its contents. A kind of classical symmetry has always been part of Park's architecture, but in the Ark project symmetry blossoms from within symmetry, then enfolds one within another until the ~~pieced-together formations~~ ^{to ward synthesis of very deliberate independent} and the ~~almost-arbitrary shapes~~ ^{forms a synthesis of unity and order.} ~~become demonic, or divine.~~ These are celestial structures, brought firmly to earth. They are the seeds of an architecture, perhaps of the city Park has always left out of his drawings for these avowedly urban projects. Of course, the evocative sections, elevations and plans drawn in ruled, crisp pencil lines are unresolved, incomplete. But this is experimental work, risky and original. Its fragmentary nature is not only inevitable, but is--at this stage--necessary, to allow for further experimental play. *for it to have a future.*

*benefit of
collectivism*

This show was something of a triumph for Storefront, which has several times risen from its own ashes--most recently last December when it was reinstituted with the help of the painter, Shirin Neshat, from a chaotic collapse after a mammoth exhibition about the homeless had seemed to drain to the dregs its individual and collective energies. Happily, not so. The freshness and originality of this exhibition, as well as its superior technical competence, demonstrated not only that Storefront is back, but that it is assuming a significant role in the New York architectural community as a place where brave new work can finally be seen.